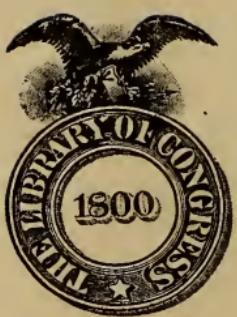


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[With the Author's Compliments.]

ADDRESSES
TO THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF
ELOCUTIONISTS.

SPEAK DISTINCTLY, AND SPEAK OUT." [P. 24.]

By ALEXANDER MELVILLE BELL,
Honorary Member of the Association.

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A D D R E S S

TO THE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELOCUTIONISTS.

SINCE I have been settled in the United States, I have done nothing in the way of teaching, beyond giving an occasional private lesson; so that, when you enrolled me as an honorary member of this Association, your recognition was not so much of a fellow teacher, as of one who was believed to have at heart the interests of Elocution, from long connection with the study and teaching of the subject. I am glad to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the Association for its gratifying action in my behalf; and to assure you of my desire to see this National Association of Elocutionists prosper, in numbers and influence, throughout the United States.

I have had the pleasure of dedicating to you a couple of little pamphlets on topics of professional interest; and I purpose, on this

occasion, to make a few remarks on some practical points, which I think worthy of your attention.

When I first visited the city of Boston, in 1868, I met our distinguished professional brother, the late Lewis B. Monroe, who was then Superintendent of Elocution in the city schools. I was taken by Professor Monroe on one of his rounds of visits to the schools, and I witnessed with delight the affectionate greeting of the various classes to their beloved instructor. As I afterwards told Professor Monroe, I had been particularly struck with the way in which his pupils spoke out. I could not get my young lady classes in Edinburgh or London to deliver the voice with anything like the same energy and clearness. The effect was no doubt due to the teacher's personal magnetism, which irresistibly drew out the expressive sounds with loving confidence. This art of speaking out is one of the principal topics on which I wish to address you.

Speaking out is a very different thing from yelling or bawling—which is far from being uncommon. Yelling keeps the voice constantly on the strain, and violates the mechanical principles of vocal expression; which re-

quire each tone to taper in force, and to start from a higher or lower pitch according as it is afterwards to turn downwards or upwards. Yelling tones are hardly inflected at all. The female voice in this country is too generally harsh, high in pitch, and inflexible. What King Lear says of Cordelia may be commended to all ladies :

“ Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low :—
An excellent thing in woman.”

Speaking out consists simply in intensifying the vowel sounds, without interfering with expressive intonation. We instinctively raise the voice in calling to a person at a distance ; and we should, in speaking to an audience, throw out the sound so as to reach the farthest hearer. The voice may fail to carry so far ; but it will, at all events, go to the extent of the speaker’s power, and be well heard at all intermediate distances. The fault with many speakers is that the voice is not aimed at any point ; it merely tumbles out, like a bullet with no explosive behind it.

There is another subject which cannot fail to strike an observer ; namely, the excessive motion which, among school children, is

given to the mouth in speaking. I do not refer to the GUM habit; although that, I suspect, is directly responsible for another but happily less common fault; namely, the working of the jaw from side to side. Vertical jerking is bad enough, but when to this is added horizontal oscillation, the effect is most unsightly.

The tongue, and not the jaw, is the agent of articulation; but one can scarcely be conscious of the tongue's positions while the jaw is constantly opening and closing. These motions really effect nothing. Voice is formed in the throat, and its emission through the mouth is impeded rather than facilitated by this masticatory action. The clear articulation of consonants, too, depends on lingual firmness, and this is rendered impossible by the looseness of the jaw; substituting for internal impulse what some one has aptly described as "chin-whack." Consonants in this way lose their essential percussive quality, and the whole of speech becomes slurred and indistinct.

When I condemn this excessive action of the jaw I am not to be understood as recommending speakers to keep the teeth closed. Open the mouth freely, to the degree requi-

site to let the vowels out directly from the throat, without being muffled by teeth, or lips, or any part of the oral channel. Expansion of the *back* of the mouth increases the free cavity far more than can be accomplished by the widest opening of the jaw. This interior expansion is, therefore, what we should cultivate.

The purity of the voice is apt to be affected in various ways; as: through contraction of the fauces, or of the lips—shrouding the sound, as it were behind a veil;—or through interception of the voice by the soft palate, and consequent emission through the nose.

The latter fault is very common. Its cause is depression of the soft palate; and its cure is elevation of the soft palate;—an action which, at the same time, expands the mouth passage, and also prevents the diversion of the breath into the nose.

But this is not the place for entering into particulars such as pertain to text-books. My desire is to deal only with general principles; respecting which, I think, there will be little difference of opinion.

There should be no difficulty in correcting the nasalizing habit, unless such as arises from

the fact, that so many of the correctors are themselves addicted to it. You remember what Rosalind says of love:

“Love is merely a madness; and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip, as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary, that the whippers are in love too.”

Habits—especially those of speech—are formed imperceptibly, and, rarely without difficulty, do we become conscious of their singularity. Even nursery characteristics remain persistent in adult life. A habit of lisping, for example, or some other childish trick of mispronunciation, may deform the utterance of the Bench or the Pulpit; while every ear, but, perhaps, that of the speaker, is observant of the defect. The tones and articulations of our earliest dialect are transplanted to our latest acquirements in language. Thus we hear English-French, Scotch-French, Irish-French, German-French, &c.; the nationality of the speaker being revealed through some petty difference in the utterance of an elementary sound. Such shibboleths are—the trilled R of Scotland, the vowelized R of Eng-

land, the name-sounds of A and O in both these countries, the sounds of B D G in Germany, and the sound of Er, and also the diphthongal pronunciation of short vowels, in the United States.

A class of even the youngest children may be made to pronounce all elementary sounds with uniformity. This should be a regular exercise, until the ears are trained to discriminate the nicest varieties. And what an advantage would be thus conferred, not only in the use of our native language, but also in the mastery of any foreign tongue!

The value of elementary exercise can hardly be overrated. Elocutionary pupils are apt to be impatient to get to reading and declamation, without being troubled with elements. Here the skill and tact of the teacher are displayed, in giving interest to rudimentary drill, and in partially gratifying the young ambition by regulated indulgence in the practice of delivery. Some of the greatest masters of singing never allowed their pupils to practise a single song. There is no way by which the voice and the ear can be so effectively cultivated, as by the practice of scales and exercises. Every lesson should include a portion

of such work. I may be allowed to say that I speak from long experience in this matter. I commenced each of my class-lessons by a revision of the scales of articulate elements and tones. This occupied only a few minutes; but it made the pupils so familiar with all the relations of the sounds that practical application became spontaneous. And I am sure that weariness of that portion of the lesson was unknown.

My own studies were for many years altogether elementary. The Tables of vowels, of consonants, and of tones, which I published in 1849, represented a long antecedent of study and experiment. My days being filled up with practical work in teaching, the nights, —strictly limited to the hours from ten p. m. till two a. m.—were devoted to theoretical work, in investigating the mechanism of sounds, and in tabulating all appreciated varieties.

An international effort had been made by leading philologists of Europe to frame a Universal Alphabet by collecting the elementary sounds from languages; but the attempt had been definitely abandoned as impracticable, or,—as the record shows,—as “impossible.”

I had been striving, in the meantime, to find the basis of a universal alphabet—not in languages, but in the organs of speech. In this, after many years, I was successful. Then—and not till then—I discovered that my schemes of sounds were susceptible of a self-explanatory symbolism, by which writing became a real **VISIBLE SPEECH**. Seeking merely for a universal alphabet, I had found a means of teaching Universal Speech in connection with any language.

I may add that the system has been used, hitherto, chiefly in teaching the deaf to speak. Its most comprehensive application, namely to foreign tongues, has, as yet, been but little developed. There is a world-wide field waiting for cultivation by linguistic students of Visible Speech.

Recurring to our more immediate subject, Elocution;—Nothing more shows the need of speech-training in common schools, than the smothered vocality, and articulative mumbling, which characterize the delivery of a large proportion of adult speakers. These, after having passed through the whole curriculum of the schools, fail in the first requirement of delivery—namely, to make

themselves intelligible,—when they appear on the platform. They mutter, as if reading only for their own information; and their hearers have to strain attention to catch a sentence, or a word, here and there.

This defect is most prominent in Learned Societies, the meetings of which are, from this cause, too often, a weariness to the spirit. You will hear matter which is well worthy of being treasured and pondered, but which is entirely thrown away through ineffective delivery. The reproach here belongs to the schools. Every boy and every girl should be taught to speak distinctly, and to speak so that the voice may easily reach the hearers. Of course, where elocution is made a separate study, these matters are attended to; but they should never be neglected, even where elocution is unheard of. They belong to common sense.

Indistinctness of articulation, and smothering of the voice, are the two prevailing faults of public speaking, and they defeat its very object. Gentlemen who "read papers" come on the platform without preparation for the reading. They ought to be so familiar with their subject that they do not need to

keep the eye constantly on the writing; yet this is the habitual attitude of a large majority of these readers. Common courtesy dictates that a speaker should look at the person addressed. You might as well post a letter without address on the envelope, as read without directing the matter by the eye to the hearers. What might otherwise be disregarded, or consigned to the mental wastebasket, will be received with attention, when thus presented as a personal communication. The freedom of the eye to range among the auditors, of course involves familiarity with the page, by rehearsals of the reading. You slight your audience when you stumble over words in attempted "reading at sight."

A paper intended to be read publicly is generally written with a view to delivery; allowance being made for the effect of vocal expression to make clear what might otherwise need to be stated in greater detail. But how often we hear papers that drag through a mass of what seem gleanings from a notebook; that lack point and finish; and are like those formless sketches which an artist makes as mere memoranda from which he may ultimately elaborate a picture. We want no

such sketchy work in our conventions, but only the fine results of care and skill. This requirement may lessen the bulk of our exhibits, and the number of contributors; but that will be no disadvantage if quality be at the same time improved.

The first requisite of a speaker is, of course, that he shall have something to say,—that is, something more than platitudes and words,—“words, words, words!” The next is, that he shall throw out his voice so as to reach his auditors,—and this depends more on vocal management than on power of lungs; the third and last is, that he shall say only one thing at a time. This is the point in which most speakers fail. Their aim seems to be simply to connect the beginning with the end of a sentence, indiscriminative of sense or sentiment in the intervening portions; and the hearer’s mind has no time to take in the separate ideas, so as afterwards to digest and assimilate them.

The result is—that strings of sentences, often bejeweled with gems of thought, pass without appreciation or recognition; and, as the homely phrase says, what we hear “goes in at one ear and out at the other.” Here is

the elocutionist's field. Take-in the whole scope of a sentence by the eye, but pronounce its parts one by one; with separation by pause, or pitch, or tone, or rate. Your object is not to say, "listen to this sentence," but "listen to these thoughts." Drive in the nails, each in its own hole, and clinch them individually by appropriate expression.

The importance of this topic will justify something more of detail. The "subject" of a sentence, when it is new to the context, should always be given by itself,—the predicate by itself, and every circumstantial phrase,—expressive of how, or why, or what, or any subordinate fact,—should stand apart, in higher or lower relief, from the body of the sentence. A Master of Ceremonies is not more punctilious in his arrangements, than a speaker, in the distribution of light and shade among his clausular and sentential utterances.

This logical quality of delivery finds its best illustrations on the stage. All eminent actors have uniformly been exemplars of such leisurely and thoughtful elocution.

"And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night?"

"Oh, against all rule: most ungrammati-

cally! Betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in number, case, and gender, he made a breach, — thus — stopping as if the point wanted settling; and betwixt the nominative and the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times;—three seconds and three fifths, by a stop-watch, each time! Admirable grammarian!"

"But, in suspending his voice, was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm? Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look?"

"I looked only at the stop-watch."

"Excellent critic!"

A good speaker will always make use of these silent expressions of attitude, countenance, and eye, to corroborate and enforce his language.

Speakers in this country suffer no disadvantage by comparison with those in Britain. My experience on both sides of the Atlantic has been the same; namely, that the most highly educated classes furnish the smallest proportion of effective orators and readers. Of course there is a cause for this. The cause is patent;—in the fact that the subject of vocal

delivery is neglected in schools and colleges. Elocution has a bad name. It is supposed to be unworthy of serious study. Scholarship despises it. Mouthing and rant are its popular representatives. This Association will, I trust, redeem the name by establishing a standard of culture and refinement, that will elevate the study in the estimation of the learned world.

The modern degradation of an art, which formed the most honoured division of the ancient all-embracing study of Rhetoric, is, no doubt, largely due to belittlement by elocutionists themselves. The stigma of this we inherit; and our first care must be to live it down—by scientific precept and example, in our own professional work.

When you come together, in annual convention, for mutual profit and social communion, the least and last of the objects that should be aimed at is individual display. This is too much associated with the name of Elocution already. You, as teachers, have many practical points to discuss, many theories to examine and compare; and these meetings should be mainly devoted to exercises of this kind. The chief function of such peri-

odical assemblies, is, I conceive, to act as a Parliament of Elocutionists ; to consider questions of common interest ; to investigate methods ; to receive and issue suggestions ; and to diffuse information among the members of the association.

Exhibitions of dramatic and other gifts of delivery, and opportunities for mutual criticism, are, however, not to be neglected. Simply discourage the idea that such entertainments constitute the sum and substance of Elocution. Distinguish between business and pleasure, and attend to business first.

Our present primary object must be to prove the *worthiness* of elocution as an intellectual study. This study necessarily includes composition, as well as delivery ; the analysis and synthesis of language ; the theoretical and vocal principles of expression ; the art of breathing ; the distinctions of inflexion and pitch ; the laws and practical application of emphasis ; the cultivation of dramatic power ; and everything pertaining to attitude and gesture. There is, undoubtedly, some principle involved in whatever we do ; and we should have a clear perception of what we do, in any given case, as well as be able to

furnish the reason for our so doing. Self-observation and self-criticism are grand desiderata. As the poet Burns says :

“ O, wad some pow’r the giftie gie us,
To see ousels as ither see us !
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.”

An old writer observes, in reference to this faculty of self-examination : “ As the eye seeth all things and cannot see itself, so, we see other men’s faults, and cannot see our own.” We may, however, in a code of PRINCIPLES, “ set us up a glass ” where we may read “ the inmost part.”

Many years ago (1850–’51), in my young missionary zeal for my favourite subject, I gave a series of lectures on “ Elocutionary Revival and Reform ” in the principal university towns of Scotland ;—in Edinburgh, where I resided, in Glasgow, and in Aberdeen. These lectures excited—temporarily at all events—a good deal of interest; and, I remember, the points I made were precisely the same that I should repeat, were I undertaking the work to-day; namely, the want of proper recognition of the subject in schools and colleges; the real but misunderstood value of the study; the sci-.

tific basis on which instruction should be founded; and the abuse of the name of elocution, by its association with mimicry and bluster. Matters are but little changed from that day to this. These are exactly the conditions that call for present complaint.

But at last a step has been taken, by the organizing of this National Association, which may happily lead to a revival of the estimation in which delivery was held a score of centuries ago.

“What is the first requisite of oratory?” was asked of one of the great old masters.

“Action,” was the answer.

“And what the second?”

“Action.”

“And the third?”

“Action.”

Elocution now means what “action” did in this celebrated dialogue. Elocution was then assumed to be the one thing needful; the first and last requirement of the public speaker.

Our valuation may not quite reach so high a pitch; but we see enough every day of the influence of delivery, to convince us of the enormous advantages which even a moderate

degree of superiority gives to its fortunate possessor.

Good speakers are by no means rare, but they are heard chiefly among conversationalists; who have only to cultivate the art of speaking out, to excel on the platform as in the coterie. The conversational style will never give a speaker high rank. The voice wants resonance, the vowels want precision, and the consonants want firmness. The slurring of syllables, which characterizes ordinary conversation, is fatal to success in oratory.

The conversational style has, unfortunately, taken possession of the stage; and greatness of artistic delineation, in the higher drama, is almost unknown. The theatres are too large for the performers; or rather the style of the performers is too small for the theatres; and the success of a piece depends more on the costumer, and the scene-painter, than on the dramatic writer, or on the actor. There is no place for elocution.

The elocution of the theatre must be on a scale commensurate with the distance of the speaker from the hearers. Just as a picture intended to be viewed a few feet off would be worthless as a piece of stage drapery,

so, delivery that serves for tête-à-tête colloquy is worthless for stage dialogue. Our players fail to realize this. They speak to one another with what would be a very natural effect, if they were *only* speaking to one another ; but they must remember that their most private conversations are intended, not for their own ears, but for a whole houseful of listeners. Even a stage whisper must be audible to the farthest limit of the gallery. The work of the scene-painter—beautifully effective in the distance—looks rough and meaningless to one who is close to the canvas ; and so, the *sotto voce* of the actor may sound anything but soft to one who stands at his elbow. “ ‘Tis distance lends enchantment to the view”—and also to the voice. Action and utterance must combine to produce a sort of ventriloquial deception on the ear. This is one of the causes that make the art of acting so difficult of mastery.

Some of the best public speakers I have ever heard were ladies. Their crisp articulation, clear vocality, and distinct syllabication were a perfect delight to the ear ; while their intonations were full of sweetness, music, and expressive variety. Such examples show to what heights elocution may attain.



The estimation in which our art is held will, certainly, not be enhanced by those who put posturing on a level with pronouncing ; and who teach an elocution of the limbs, as well as of the voice. Gesture is, properly, only an accompaniment to speech—except in pantomime ; and the speaker should never encroach on the pantomimist's function. To combine pantomime with speech—a very common fault among uncultivated speakers—is tautology ; but there seems a tendency, in higher quarters, to dignify this fault by its adoption as a virtue. The best actors use the least gesticulation.

Your department of elocutionary work is—Teaching. You have, therefore, to direct all classes of speakers ; to lay the foundation, in some cases, and to finish the building, in others. Your professional requirements are, consequently, high and varied. You must have a good ear, a good voice, good articulation, good manner, and good judgment ; you must be good phoneticians, good students, good exemplars, and good listeners. And to all these good qualities you must add unwearying patience—to bear with those who are not good at anything.

The fact is very curious that, among our most effective speakers, delivery is often characterized and marred by peculiarities of voice, or utterance, or action. We feel that, wanting these defects, the speaker's power would have been increased tenfold; but we also recognize, that, in spite of these defects, undoubted greatness has been achieved. We learn hence that the true elements of success are independent of the niceties of art. We cannot make a good speaker by merely teaching him how to speak. The spirit of the orator must be within. But there are some qualities which all effective speakers have in common, and on which their influence depends; namely, they all speak distinctly, and they all speak out. These, then, are the PRIME ELOCUTIONARY REQUISITES.

The best teacher may still say that he continues to be a learner. Let us all aim at progressive studentship throughout life; let us improve to our utmost ability the powers we possess; and encourage in others every effort to develop and dignify the glorious faculty of Speech!

I do not know that I have anything further to say on this occasion.—How often

have we wished, that speakers, under similar circumstances, would realize the fact, and stop! Instead of doing so, they keep on adding, one after another, concluding sentences; or some new "head" springs up like an unexpected Jack-in-a-box. I shall not inflict this tantalizing process on you but shall at once conclude, by simply commanding these discursive remarks to your kindly acceptance.

I cannot, I fear, have the pleasure of being present at your proximate meeting in Boston; and therefore I take this method of addressing you, in the hope that some of the points I have indicated may be thought worthy of your consideration.

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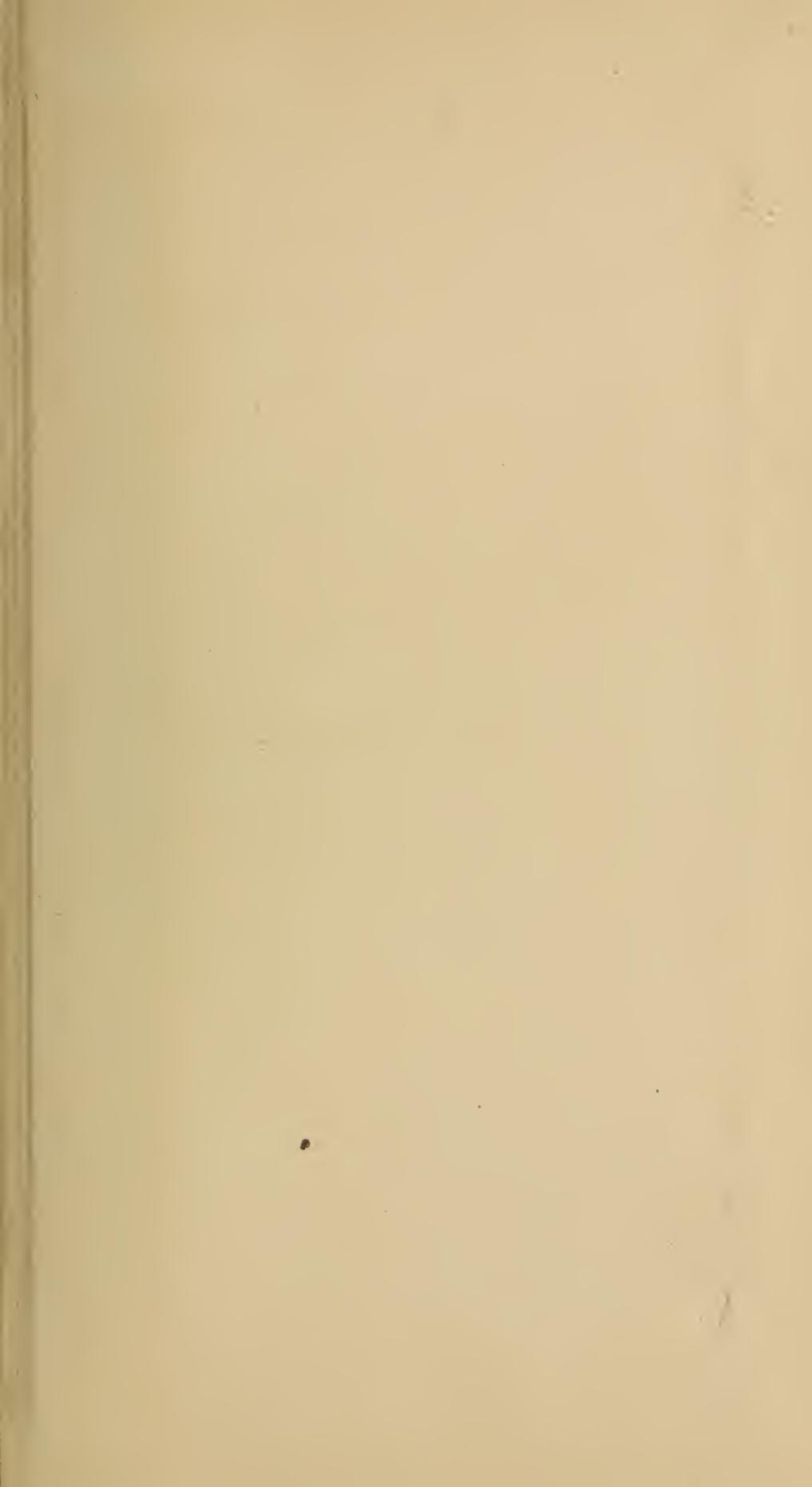
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